

**Shape shifter**

Old man, I heard you on the radio,  
last week it was; e koro  
you are fading fast, silvering, slowing down.

The bouncy girl on the other mike  
had a voice taut and springy as a rubber ball,  
while yours flowed deep and slow,  
soft-edged, eddying in quiet swirls,  
singing a rhythm closer to the earth than us.

E koro, you call for women  
to write their passion boldly on the page –  
as if you weren't the only man brave  
and humble enough to do just that  
in this cool, reserved land of ours;

you call for poetry to be as real  
as every thing that moves us  
be it anger, humour, exaltation  
or the loves and lusts which shape  
the singularity of our lives.

You're not afraid of death;  
I 'know' – I've read it in your poems.  
I've heard you on the telly,  
and on the radio last week I heard

her rhythm in your voice and one day soon  
she'll snap her knees together  
and you'll be flung into her distant night.

Hine-nui-o-te-po.

E koro,  
you will ravish her:  
sly-fingered, you will offer  
greenstone words, leaping silver fish,  
the lumbering laughter of Tangaroa,  
and the aching passion of the land  
that has licked your feet these many years;  
she will lap you up!

Old man, I heard you on the radio □ last week,  
soft-edged, calling for passionate poems,  
from women.

Kei te pai, e koro,  
lean on your laurels a little,  
let us give to you a while;  
gather your strength – even for you,  
that Hine will be a real tough nut to crack

**Miriam Richardson**

1999